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ABSTRACT

This paper synthesizes literature which relates to the successful transition of students with learning disabilities upon leaving high school. The first section defines transition and analyzes the components of transition as outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The second section reviews issues related to students with learning disabilities when transitioning from high school to post-secondary education institutions, and how to properly prepare these individuals. Transition from high school to work is addressed in the third section. This section illustrates the need for vocational education as a part of the transition process in the employment domain. The final section reviews best practices to ensure successful transition to post-secondary activities. It emphasizes the need for student-centered activities, participation of students and parents in the transition planning process, self-determination, the development of self-advocacy skills, life skills training, coordination of transition services, and community transition teams. Suggestions are provided for parents of students with learning disabilities who are in the transition planning process, including knowing the school's approach to transitional planning, keeping accurate and up-to-date records of the students, knowing personal and legal rights, reinforcing students' preparation for transition, and keeping the line of communication open with other members and agencies of the transition planning team. (Contains 24 references.) (CR)

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Life After High School:

Transitional Issues for Learning Disabled Students

ED 427 452

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A research paper submitted to the faculty of the department of Special Education at Chicago State University in partial fulfillment for the degree of Masters of Science.

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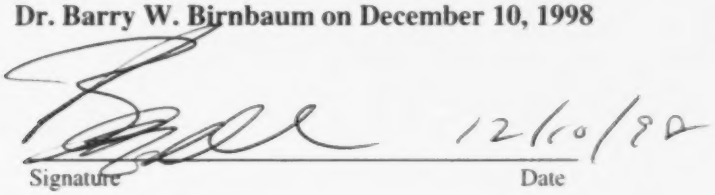

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Abstract

With the growing number of learning disabled students leaving mandated special education programs, several pieces of legislation have been put into action to promote successful transition into adulthood. Within four sections, this document synthesizes literature, which relates to the transition of learning disabled students upon leaving high school. The first section of this document defines transition and analyzes the components of transition as outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The second section reviews issues relating to learning disabled students when transitioning from high school to post-secondary education institutions, and how to properly prepare these individuals. Transition from high school to work is the third section. This section illustrates the need for vocational education as a part of the transition process in the employment domain. The final section reviews best practices, which focuses on the student, to ensure successful transition to post-secondary activities. Based on the literature, learning disabled students are in need of transitional services in order to become independent adults.

Life After High School:

Transitional Issues for Learning Disabled Students

Since the federal definition of learning disabilities was introduced in 1975, it has become the largest area to serve special education students. According to the United States Department of Education (1997), 2,424,000 students in the U.S., aged 6-21 were classified as being learning disabled in 1993-1994. Of 4.7 million primary and secondary students with disabilities, the U.S. Department of Education found that 51.2% or 2.4 million were labeled learning disabled. Eventually, after years of individualized instruction in a mandated special education program, these students will leave high school. As learning disabled students prepare to enter the adult world, feelings of anxiety arise because these students are uncertain about the future, and these individuals lack information regarding opportunities and resources for post-secondary education, employment, and independent community living (Furney, Haszi, and Destefano, 1997). It is obvious that unless something is done to prepare these students, these individuals will be ill prepared for post-secondary life. The implementation of transitional services was designed to better prepare special education students upon completion of a public special education program. Since the aspects of learning disabilities continues into adulthood, it is imperative to have an existing transition plan to help learning disabled individuals become successful, productive members of society.

Until recently, transition services were primarily geared toward students with severe disabilities e.g. cognitively delayed, visually impaired, auditorily impaired, and physically handicapped. It was once believed by educators and legislators that learning disabled students had adequate skills needed in order to become productive members of society

without transitional support (Bassett and Smith, 1996). However, research has indicated just the opposite. There are several studies which support why transitional services are needed for learning disabled students.

According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education (NLTS) 32% of learning disabled students dropped out of high school in the 1985-1986 or 1986-1987 school year (Lichtenstein, 1993). Even though 32% does not appear to be significantly high, according to Lichtenstein's research, it is when compared to 25.9% dropout rate for students in regular education programs. Based on Lichtenstein's research, students with disabilities who drop out of school are at greater risk of being economically and socially dependent.

Research findings, regarding employment of learning disabled adults, indicate that while most learning disabled adults have jobs at about the same rate as non learning disabled peers, most work on a part time basis, at an entry level position, and for minimum wage (Sitlington, Frank, and Carson, 1993). Many times, learning disabled individuals lack the skills and self-confidence needed to be promoted (Adelman and Vogel, 1993). Studies have also indicated that learning disabled individuals are less satisfied socially, are of lower social economic status, and are more dependent of family members (Rojewski, 1994)

Research findings also suggest that despite average or above average intelligence, fewer learning disabled students opt to attend either two-year or four-year colleges (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities [NJCLD], 1994). Based on the NLTS, only 12.4% of learning disabled students choose to attend two-year and four-year colleges after graduating from high school (Adelman and Vogel, 1993). The NJCLD (1994) stated

"many learning disabled students are not encouraged, assisted, or prepared for post secondary education." (p. 69). Unlike their non-disabled peers, learning disabled students have more challenges in college due to their disabilities (Brinckerhoff, 1996).

Because of the increasing number of learning disabled students who are graduating or dropping out of a mandated special education secondary program, there has been a great deal of attention devoted to learning disabled adults, and how they function in society. This document will review the components of a transition plan; the importance of transition as it applies to learning disabled students, and review best practices in preparing learning disabled students for life after high school.

What is Transition?

In 1990, the United States Congress amended Public Law 94-142 (The Education for All Handicap Children Act) to what is now The Individuals with Disabilities Act or IDEA (Public Law 101-476). In June of 1997, IDEA was reauthorized (Public Law 105-17). One of the major components of IDEA was to include Transitional Services in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for disabled students by the age of 16 or as early as age 14 when deemed necessary (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities [NICHCY], 1993). What this does, in general terms, is to prepare disabled students for adult life upon successfully completing a secondary special education program. The NJCLD (1994) stated " Comprehensive transition planning needs to address several domains including education, employment, personal responsibility, relationships, home and family leisure pursuits, community involvement, and physical and emotional health." (p. 71). Transition services as outlined by IDEA (PL 105-17, Section 602 20 U.S.C. 1401, Paragraph 30a,b, c) are:

> (a)... a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.
>
> (b) The coordinated set of activities... must--
>
> (1) Be based upon the individual students needs, taking into account the students preferences and interests; and
>
> (2) Include--
>
> (i) Instruction;
>
> (ii) Community experiences;
>
> (iii) The development of employment and other post school adult living objectives; and
>
> (iv) If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

To better understand the federal definition of transition services, it is necessary to briefly explain each component.

According to the federal definition, "coordinated set of activities" is the integration of the post-school activities, and the different agencies who are responsible for providing services to a special education student (NICHCY, 1993). According to NICHCY, It is crucial that the transitional activities complement each other and work together, yet independently, to meet the special needs of a student. NICHCY stated "because the transition process relies on the involvement of many individuals and many service

providers, this coordination of effort is essential." (p. 4).

IDEA (1997) states " the coordinated set of activities must be designed within an outcome-oriented process."(Section 602). The term outcome-oriented process is defined by the results or planned conclusion of the transition activities of a disabled student (NICHCY, 1993). Because every student is different, the levels of successful transition varies. Regardless of varying degrees of ability, if post secondary activities are dealt with appropriately, the chances of achieving the highest level possible for post secondary life increases.

The federal definition included the term "post-school activities." What this means is that transitional services are aimed to help disabled students successfully move from a public special education program to post-school activities (NICHCY, 1993). According to NICHCY, the types of post-school activities available to a disabled student include; post secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation. According to NICHCY, due to the fact that many disabled students in the past have reported difficulty in these areas, IDEA mandates that transition planning not only addresses the employment domain, but adult life within the community.

Another important component of transitional planning is that the transitional plan be student-centered, and for the student and parents to be involved in the planning process whenever possible. What this does is enable both the student and parents to decide and agree on specific goals based on the student's needs, preferences and interest (IDEA, 1997). Many times goals are based on the preference and personal views of the teacher and other professionals instead of the student and their families (Miner and Bates, 1997).

In determining what transition services are needed, the members of the IEP team pair up with the student, his/her parents, and at least one representative of an agency who is likely to be responsible for paying for transition services (NICHCY, 1993). When establishing which services are appropriate for a particular student, many questions are raised. Typical questions asked during a transitional planning meeting, according to NICHCY, are: where will the student live after high school?; what are the student's interest?; what skills does the student have?; what skills does the student need to acquire?; what type of support does the student need?; and how many years of school does the student have left? Questions like these relate directly to the student, and in most cases, best answered by him/her.

Transition to College

As mentioned earlier, college-bound learning disabled students are faced with many more challenges than non-disabled peers. Learning disabled students may find the movement from high school to college a traumatic experience. Besides not understanding how a learning disability impairs learning, or how to communicate it to others, learning disabled students have to make some significant adjustments when transitioning to college (Brinckerhoff, 1996).

When transitioning from high school to college, there are two major changes that all college students will encounter. Those two major changes are: 1.) the amount of in- class opportunity and 2.) direct teacher-student contact (Brinckerhoff, 1996). In high school, students interact with his/her teacher everyday for about 45 – 50 minutes per class. According to Brinckerhoff, class size averages approximately 25 – 30 students, which allows a teacher to work closely with a student who may be having difficulty, or who may

need special attention. In contrast, college is impersonal due to large lecture format classes where class size could be as large as 300 students. In addition to the large size, Brinckerhoff also suggests that classes may only meet 2 or 3 times a week for 1 to 2 hours, lessening the opportunity for the student to get teacher feedback. Most non-disabled students can adjust to changes like these quickly and easily. However, when a learning disabled student tries to adjust to these changes he/she may become frustrated and feel like a fail[illegible].

College is structured in a way in which each student is responsible for his /her own learning. In college, students must learn how to prioritize allowing sufficient amount of time to study. Study time may be devoted to rewriting class notes or analyzing reading materials (Brinckerhoff, 1996). For learning disabled students, these tasks can be very difficult. While in high school, learning disabled students are in a system that provides support and frequent teacher interaction. According to Brinckerhoff, high school teachers usually require students to do homework every night, which allows a teacher to track students' progress. According to Brinckerhoff, it is a general rule in college that students allow 2 hours of study time for 1 hour of class. Based on Brinckerhoff's findings, learning disabled students, and students who are slow readers, take longer reading assigned materials, taking notes on assigned work, and interpreting important points in a given assignment. College demands that a student master a subject as opposed to rote learning. According to Brinckerhoff, tests in college are usually given twice a semester (midterm and final), but in high school students may be tested after every chapter or unit. Not being tested as often may be frustrating for learning disabled individuals who have poor study and organizational skills, because these students must retain information for a longer period

of time.

The demands of the college environment are different than those of high school (Brinckerhoff, 1996). Brinckerhoff pointed out "high school students find that their time is structured by the limitations set by parents, teachers and other adults. College environments require students to function independently by managing their time, and organizing their days." (p. 120). According to Brinckerhoff, while in college, students have the opportunity to choose their major, classes, schedules and leisure activities.

Many times, learning disabled students are not properly prepared to attend college. One major reason is due to poor curriculum planning. Usually, learning disabled students are encouraged, by teachers and counselors, to take non-college preparatory classes to avoid struggling in more difficult classes. According to Brinckerhoff (1996), instead of taking chemistry or physics, learning disabled students are advised to take easier classes like general science in order to boost the student's grade point average (GPA). While this method may help the student's GPA look impressive, it hinders his/her chances of being admitted to college. Although the criteria for admitting learning disabled students into college is different; if a student has not proven his/her ability to do college level work, it is likely that student will not be admitted into a college or university (Aune and Friehe, 1996). Brinckerhoff suggests that when preparing a learning disabled student for college, it is important to encourage the student to take college preparatory courses. By carefully planning out the curriculum, and providing the support needed, the student can experience success in classes he/she would ordinarily fail. Even if the student receives a letter grade of C, it shows college prospects that the student has the ability to do college level work.

If a student expresses an interest in going to college, teachers and counselors should

meet with the student and his/her family to decide on a timetable for taking classes in which the student may experience difficulty (Brinckerhoff, 1996). Brinckerhoff suggests that, by this point, the special education teacher should be teaching the student study skills and how to manage his/her disability instead of being a glorified tutor. This is the stage when the student should learn about his/her disability and how it effects learning. Students need to learn about his/her strengths and weakness and how it impairs the individual's learning. According to Brinckerhoff, teachers may also want to help learning disabled students verbalize to others the meaning and implications of his/her disability.

In addition to the curriculum component of preparing a learning disabled student for college, it is important for the individual to be aware of colleges and universities that have special programs and services for those who are learning disabled. Once the student, with the help of a guidance counselor, has established a tentative list of colleges and universities in which he/she is interested, the student should be advised to investigate admission policies concerning individuals who are learning disabled. One source a student may refer to for the purposes of evaluating learning disabled services is the Peterson's Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities (Brinckerhoff, 1996). Most colleges and universities require scores from standardized test like the American College Test (ACT) and the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). Brinckerhoff recommends that learning disabled students preparing to take these tests should be advised to utilize the accommodations available to them. According to Brinckerhoff, students should also be informed that accommodations are a part of his/her legal right covered under Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

While the student is exploring different college options, teachers and counselors

may need to remind the student of the benefits of attending a community college. Community colleges provide students the opportunity of going to college while continuing to have the support of friends and family in familiar surroundings (Brinckerhoff, 1996). Brinckerhoff stated "... community colleges have open admission policies; smaller class ratio; comparatively low tuition fees; academic and personal counseling; and a wide range of vocational, remedial, and developmental courses ..." (p. 127). According to Brinckerhoff, attractive benefits like these are why community colleges serve a larger proportion of learning disabled students than any other division of post secondary education.

Under Section 504, most colleges and universities provide support for learning disabled students. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandates that all public colleges and universities provide accommodations guaranteeing equal opportunity for qualified disabled students (Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz, 1996). Although Section 504 mandates accommodations for disabled students, colleges and universities are not required to lower academic standards or lessen the quality of a school's program (Scott 1994).

When a college-bound learning disabled student is considering a college or university it is important for the student to know the difference between a comprehensive program and limited support services. According to Brinckerhoff (1996), a comprehensive program consists of diagnostic testing, individualized educational programs, personal academic advisement, basic skills remediation, tutoring, counseling, and resource materials. According to Brinckerhoff, a comprehensive program is usually developed and supervised by an individual who has an extensive background in learning disabilities. In comparison, Brinckerhoff suggests that limited support services are a college's minimal

effort, under Section 504, to provide specialized services to students with disabilities to ensure those who are disabled the same opportunities as non-disabled individuals. Support services for learning disabled students usually include special testing, taped books, computers, tape recorders, note taking assistance and peer tutoring (Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz, 1996).

Unfortunately, many learning disabled students do not use the accommodations that are available to them. Aune and Friehe (1996) stated, "college administrators report that only 1% - 3% of their students request accommodations, yet almost 9% of the first year students identify themselves as having a disability." (p. 9). Aune and Friehe also suggest that some learning disabled students are afraid of being stigmatized by peers and professors, and as a result refuse to use support services.

Transition to Work

The transition domain of employment is more extensive than the movement from high school to college. Learning disabled students who decide to go straight into the workforce after graduating or dropping out of high school, also have to adjust to independent adult living. Typically, independent adults have meaningful jobs in which they are qualified (Sturomski, 1996). The income generated from employment allows adults to live independently, participate in leisure activities, and have community involvement. Without the proper skills to obtain and maintain an occupation, none of these activities would be possible.

Transitional services in the employment domain should integrate learning disabled students into typical adult experiences (Sturomski, 1996). Learning disabled students should be exposed to vocational and social demands early in the transition process. It is

essential for learning disabled individuals to learn how to live independently while working in his/her community. According to Sturomski, students must be taught how to recognize job opportunities with advancement possibilities by consulting with local organizations, and state vocational bureaus. According to Sturomski, a supportive network of resources provides students with a link between school to work, and it furnishes students with information that will help learning disabled students adjust to adult life.

Learning disabled adults experience more career-related problems than non-disabled adults. Characteristics associated with learning disabilities can easily limit an individual's potential for a successful career. When compared to the non-disabled population, learning disabled individuals have poor organizational skills, limited attention span, perceptual problems, functional limitations, poor academic skills, and are passive learners (Rojewski, 1994). There are several ways in which these characteristics are manifested on the job. Difficulty talking on the phone in loud environments, unfinished projects, and losing or misplacing important information are typical job related problems among learning disabled individuals (Adelman and Vogel, 1993).

According to Rojewski (1994), learning disabled individuals have problems in the social-personal area, which effects career development and decision making. Due to constant failure, limited social skill development, not having the skill necessary to live independently, and not having the skills to act as a self advocate, learning disabled individuals usually have a low self-esteem and low self-concept. Rojewski suggests that because of low self-esteem and low self-concept, learning disabled individuals have a low social status compared to non-disabled peers, and are at risk of being socially isolated in the workplace.

Although motivated, learning disabled individuals experience difficulty in locating and maintaining a job (Rojewski, 1994). Learning disabled individuals are more dependent on others for help in making career choices. According to Adelman and Vogel (1993), learning disabled individuals who were successful in finding employment had personal contacts. It is evident that learning disabled students need assistance in gaining meaningful employment.

Research has indicated that learning disabled adults who were employed during high school or either completed a vocational program usually are successful in obtaining occupations in clerical, craft, laborer, and service fields (Adelman and Vogel, 1993). In most cases, these individuals have entry-level positions. Because learning disabled individuals work in these types of positions, the wages these individuals receive are considerably low. According to Adelman and Vogel, most learning disabled adults are paid minimum wages. In today's economy an individual must have more than adequate monetary resources to live independently and comfortably. Unfortunately, learning disabled individuals rarely have the skills necessary to make career advancements; this can also prevent an individual from increasing his/her gross income.

The career outlook is more promising for learning disabled adults who graduate from college. Learning disabled individuals who complete college typically have careers in business, education, computer science, and social science (Adelman and Vogel, 1993). Because of the support and training learning disabled individuals receive in college, these individuals are able to earn an income in accordance with the current economy. In a study by Greenbaum, Graham, and Scales (1996), the average salary of 35 out of 49 participants who graduated from college was slightly over $20,000 a year.

When preparing adolescents, whether learning disabled or non learning disabled, it is important to consider the era and how it effects career options. Sturomski (1996), stated:

> ... the workers of the 21-century will need to be able to transition not only from school to work, but also from job or career to the next. They will need the ability to organize tasks, read, write, and use math to solve multistep problems. Successful 21st century workers will need the capacity to apply knowledge from many disciplines, solve various problems, see products through the eyes of the consumer, deal with diversity, and take responsibility for the end product (p, 38).

Because of a highly advanced technological society, learning disabled individuals must be properly trained to successfully compete for employment. Sturomski suggests that in order to prepare learning disable adolescents for the workplace, the curriculum should promote independent and lifelong learning, and it should empower learning disabled individuals to cope with major life situations.

Besides the transition services outlined in IDEA, there have been several efforts to prepare both disabled and non-disabled students for future employment. One effort was the School-to-Work Opportunities Act. This act was signed into law in May of 1994 (Sturomski, 1996). The School-to-Work Opportunities Act was designed to reorganize the education system, and to guarantee students success in the workplace. According to Sturomski, the goal of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act was to pull federal, state and local agencies together for the purpose of providing educational opportunities to all students, ensuring students the opportunity to achieve a high level of educational and occupational skills, and exposing students to employment opportunities and civic affairs.

From the School-to-Work Opportunities act, the basis for meeting the targets of Goal 2000: Educate America was established. According to Sturomski, the purpose of Goal 2000 is to increase the level of adult literacy in the United States. According to Sturomski, under Goal 2000 all American adults will have the knowledge to compete in a competitive, rapidly changing workplace in addition to being involved in the community.

In addition to the School-to-Work opportunities Act and Goal 2000: Educate America, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technological Act of 1990 (PL 101-392) was implemented with the purpose of preparing disabled students for the workplace (Sturomski, 1996). According to Sturomski, PL 101-392 mandates that vocational programs provide all students a clear understanding of the components of the employment industry the individual is preparing to enter, as well as incorporate academic and problem solving skills. The goals of PL 101-392 are the following: to increase the number of disabled students in vocational programs, improve the quality of vocational programs in schools in which students would benefit most from vocational education programs, increasing the probability of educational achievement for all students, and ensuring that vocational education students have adequate skills in a society that is technologically advanced (Florida State Department of Education, 1994). Sturomski also suggests that, in essence, this act strengthens the role of vocational education during the transition process for disabled students.

Research has suggested that vocational training while in high school has more benefits than vocational training upon completing high school (Asselin and Mooney, 1995). One benefit of vocational training during the high school years is that it increases students' likelihood of graduating form high school instead of dropping out. Another benefit of

vocational education during high school years is that it raises students' self-esteem. Also, Asselin and Mooney suggest that students who participate in a vocational education program while in high school, are provided a bridge between school and career, which gives learning disabled students the support needed when making career choices.

To properly place a learning disabled individual in a vocational program, the use of a vocational assessment could be beneficial. According to NICHCY (1993), vocational assessment is a continuous systematic process, which enables students and parents to understand a student's vocational interest and potential. According to NICHCY, the assessment process gives students and parents an opportunity to learn about different occupations, and the student's personal vocational strengths and weaknesses. According to NICHCY, issues which need to be addressed when a student is participating in a vocational assessment, includes student's occupational and vocational interest and preferences, measurement in specific job related skills, student's learning style, student's work ethics, and student's preferred work environment.

When a learning disabled student is placed in a vocational program as part of his/her transitional plan, it is important that the vocational educator is a part of the process as early as possible (Asselin and Mooney, 1995). By participating in the transitional process as early as possible, the vocational teacher is able to adequately address the student's long term vocational and independent needs. The vocational educator is responsible for identifying the student's learning style and potential, in order to properly accommodate the student during vocational classes. According to Asselin and Mooney, it is equally important for the vocational educator to properly train the student on the use of equipment and machinery relating to the student's future career in accordance to safety

regulations. Asselin and Mooney suggest that the vocational education teacher is also responsible for teaching students' personal rights, responsibilities, and self-management skills.

With respect to the vocational education program, NICHCY (1993) recommended that vocational educators place learning disabled students in jobs within the school building, where the student may practice useful skills for future employment. According to NICHCY, vocational education teachers may want to require students to work in the school office one hour a day as a lab component. According to NICHCY, while working in the school office, the student is able to practice skills such as answering the telephones, typing, filing records, and using the computer. NICHCY also points out that while working in the school building, learning disabled students are also exposed to good work ethics e.g. punctuality, respecting supervision, organizational skills, and staying on task.

In conjunction with the vocational education teacher, the special education teacher or the regular education teacher can implement certain strategies to aid in the transition from school to work. A special/regular education teacher could invite business representatives from different occupations to make presentations to the students (Asselin and Mooney, 1995). Asselin and Mooney suggest that career days or fairs allow students to collect information regarding different occupations. According to Asselin and Mooney, during career fairs students are able to participate in resume writing activities and mock interviews. Another strategy a teacher can implement is the use of pen pals. According to Asselin and Mooney, the pen pal method encourage students to write workers in the community about job related issues. Teachers may also post career bulletin boards and create a career library, which provides students with descriptions and skill requirements of

various occupations.

While a student is receiving transitional services in the employment domain, it is important that the student understands his/her personal and legal rights in the workplace. One form of legislation, which protects disabled individuals from discrimination in the workplace, is the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (Satcher, 1994). According to Satcher, the ADA also obligates employers to provide feasible accommodations for disabled individuals in the workplace. The ADA is similar to Section 504 except that ADA refers to private industries and not public organizations (Sturomski, 1994). According to Satcher, employers are not required to lower job qualifications for disabled persons under the ADA. Regardless of the disability, Satcher suggests that a qualified individual is a person who can perform the duties of a job with or without reasonable accommodations.

Under the ADA, learning disabled individuals are free from having to disclose information regarding his/her disability if there is not a need for accommodations. Also, learning disabled individuals have the right to request accommodations from his/her employer (Satcher, 1994). In order for a learning disabled individual to take advantage of available accommodations, he/she must be able to effectively communicate to an employer what accommodations are needed and why. According to Satcher, a learning disabled individual must be a self-advocator when requesting accommodations. Satcher reviewed several accommodations a learning disabled individual may use to increase work potential. Specific accommodations, as outlined by Satcher, are:

> (a) restructuring the job so that other workers assume the duties directly impacted by the disability; (b) modifying work schedules; (c) altering how

examinations, training materials or policies are presented; (d) providing qualified reader; and (e) acquiring or modifying equipment or devices. (p. 209).

Transitional services in the employment domain should not diminish once a student leaves high school. Learning disabled adults need continuous education to improve skills that will increase employment opportunities, and improve the quality of personal life. According to Adelman and Vogel (1993), ongoing assistance is needed to improve reading, math skills, written expression, interpersonal skills, and utilization of compensatory tactics. According to Adelman and Vogel, adult remediation centers usually offers learning disabled individuals training in basic skills, job placement services, consultation services, and support groups.

Best Practices for Transition

Whether a student is going to college or straight into the workforce after high school, it is necessary to design a program, which enables a student to experience optimal success in the future. Student-centered or person-centered activities not only meet the requirements in IDEA but, it also enables students and parents to be more involved in the transition planning process (Miner and Bates, 1997). Under this approach, a student's transition plan should reflect the student's interest, preferences, and desires. According to Miner and Bates, students are able to express his/her goals for the future, and transitional plans should be designed to help the student achieve his/her goals. Sturomski (1996), stated "active involvement in the transition process is essential for individuals with learning disabilities who should be involved in the transition planning to promote their own understanding, independence and self-advocacy." (p. 42). According to Durlak, Rose, and

Bursuck (1994), these characteristics and skills are related to high levels of self-determination.

Recently, legislation has placed an emphasis on self-determination during the transitional process (Field, 1996). According to Durlak et al. (1994), "Self-determination refers to the extent to which a person assumes responsibility for his or her own goals, accomplishments, and setback." (p. 51). Because learning disabled individuals face several obstacles during a lifetime, teaching learning disabled individuals how to be self-determined can be a difficult task. There are several models which may be used to increase a student's self-determination. Four self-determination models, according to Field, are: 1.) Model focused on an individual's beliefs, knowledge, and skills; 2.) Model based on self-determination as an adult outcome; 3.) Model based on self-regulation theory; and 4.) Model developed from an ecosystem's position. Field also suggests that there are several instructional strategies and environmental issues, which have been initiated to promote self-determination of learning disabled students. Those instructional strategies include "(a) using modeling, (b) providing opportunities for choice, (c) providing attribution retraining, and (d) using appropriate behavior strategies." (p. 47).

Regardless of which path a learning disabled individual takes upon leaving high school, it is imperative that he/she learns how to be a self-advocate. In many cases, self-advocacy has been used interchangeably with self-determination (Field, 1996). However, according to Field, self-advocacy is a component of self-determination. According to NICHCY (1993), learning disabled individuals need self-advocacy skills to communicate specific needs in the workplace, in educational settings, and within the community. Teaching learning disabled students how to be a self-advocator can be a difficult task,

however, a teacher can help a learning disabled student understand his/her disability and what types of accommodations he/she may need in order to accomplish certain tasks (Dowdy, 1996). According to Dowdy, there are six goals of empowerment for self-advocacy. Those six goals are:

> 1.) Students must know themselves well. They should be able to discuss their strengths and limitations and be able to describe areas of life they approach differently because of their disability; 2.) Students should be competent in gathering and managing information; 3.) Students should view professionals and their families as "consultants" as they make their own life choices; 4.) Students must be able to effectively communicate their goals; 5.) Students should develop meta-cognitive skills to compensate for their limitations in planning, organizing, goal setting, and self-monitoring; and 6.) Students must be able to generalize knowledge and skills from the school environment to the work environment. (p. 145).

In addition to self-determination skills, learning disabled individuals should be taught life skills. According to Sturomski (1996), life skills include balancing a checkbook, using public transportation, participating in recreational activities, and making wise consumer decisions. NICHCY (1993) suggest several ways in which daily living skills may be incorporated in the classroom. Some examples given by NICHCY are: grocery shopping in home economics class, money management in math class, reading the phone book and help wanted advertisements in English, and transportation issues in drivers' education class. In connection with life skills, learning disabled students must learn how to behave and communicate in social settings. According to the NJCLD (1994),

it is essential that learning disabled students develop appropriate social skills and interpersonal communication skills. NICHCY suggests that adequate social skills can help an individual develop and maintain friendships, and properly interact with employers and educators. Sturomski also suggested that learning disabled individuals learn how to take risks, be persistent, and implement different approaches to new life situations.

According to IDEA (1990), transition programs must be a collaborative effort between schools, students, parents, teachers, other professionals, and outside agencies. It is necessary that the team works together to successfully achieve the goals of the student's Individualized Transition Plan (ITP). It is essential that the transition planning process begin as early as possible. Asselin and Money (1995) suggest that the transition planning process start as early as elementary school. According to Asselin and Mooney, team members need sufficient time to analyze information and make decisions. Asselin and Mooney further suggest how important it is for schools and agencies to have ample time to deliver services addressed in the student's ITP. A student's ITP must be relevant to his/her specific needs, as well as current. According to Asselin and Mooney, transitional plans should be reviewed once a year, or when a critical change has taken place in a student's life.

During the transitional planning process, it is essential for someone to coordinate all of the parties involved to avoid overlapping or overlooking a specific service. According to Asselin, Todd-Allen, and Defur (1998), high school educators now have a new role as transition coordinator. Even though transition coordinators' responsibilities varies depending on the school, district and state, Asselin et al. have established specific categories of duties associated with transition coordinators. Categories of duties as

outlined by Asselin et al. are "intraschool and intraagency linkages, assessment and career counseling, transition planning, education and community training, family support, public relations, program development, and program evaluation." (p. 13). Transition coordinators may find it helpful to use planning checklist in the planning process (Asselin and Mooney, 1995). A checklist may help determine specific needs and services of a student, and match these needs with the appropriate professional or agency.

Another approach to transitional planning, which may be considered a best practice, is community transition teams. Community transition teams were designed with the concept that disabled students learn to participate and contribute to the life of his/her community (NICHCY, 1993). Successful transition of a learning disabled student sometimes goes beyond the capabilities of the public school (Blalock, 1996). In addition to the school-based transition team, community transition teams also include professionals and agencies from within the student's community. According to Blalock, community representatives included in a community transition team are post-secondary educators, job placement services, community leaders, directors of recreational programs, entertainment and sports organizers, community center staff members, mental health personnel, vocation rehabilitation officials, and county extension agents. According to Blalock, the main purpose of community teams is to improve, develop and support effective transition programs for students. According to Blalock, community transition teams are effective because the range of representatives work as a team in creating and implementing a comprehensive transitional program within the community.

Parents play a key role during the transition process. Besides providing support, it is imperative that the parents of learning disabled students become active participants in the

transition planning process. The following list, provided by NICHCY (1993), are suggestions for parents of learning disabled students who are in the transition planing process.

1. Know the school's approach to transitional planning.
2. Keep accurate and up to date records of the student.
3. Know personal and legal rights as a parent and legal rights of the student.
4. Encourage student to express his or her view during IEP and ITP meetings.
5. Keep a copy of the student's IEP including transitional goals.
6. Reinforce student's preparation for transition as much as possible.
7. Keep the line of communication open with other members and agencies of the transition planning team.

Summary

As the number of learning disabled students in mandated special education programs continue to increase, there is a growing concern regarding the opportunities available to these individuals upon graduating from high school. Without the implementation of transitional services, these individuals will not have the adequate skills to survive independently after high school. With the passage of IDEA in 1990, it is mandated that every IEP have a transitional plan for special education students by the age of 16. The purpose of providing transition services is to better prepare special education students for post-secondary life. A comprehensive transition plan should include the following domains: education, career planning, relationships, leisure activities, personal responsibility, community involvement, and physical and emotional health.

Because the curriculum in college is structured differently than the curriculum in

high school, learning disabled students who decide to attend college have to make major adjustments. In order to prepare learning disabled students for college, special education teachers should provide instructional support to the student in addition to informing learning disabled students about his/her personal and legal rights. Learning disabled students need to know and understand what types of accommodations are needed and have the necessary skills to request accommodations. Guidance counselors should encourage learning disabled students, who plan to attend college, to take college preparatory courses. When a learning disabled student successfully completes college preparatory courses, it proves to college prospects that the student has the ability to perform at the collegiate level. Learning disabled students should also know the difference between a college comprehensive program and a limited support program. This could be a main factor when determining what college the student will attend upon graduating from high school.

When transitioning into the work force, learning disabled individuals must also prepare for independent adult living. Usually, learning disabled individuals experience difficulty in obtaining and maintaining a job. Unless these students receive adequate vocational training and have a strong networking system, these individuals will be either unemployed or underemployed. There have been several laws passed to better prepare disabled individuals for future employment. The Carl D. Perkins and Applied Technological Act of 1990 was implemented with the purpose of preparing disabled students for the workforce. Through this legislation vocational programs have become a big part of the transitional process for learning disabled students. Another piece of legislation, which attempts to protect learning disabled individuals in the work environment, is The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This act mandates that

disabled individuals are free from discrimination in the workplace. It also obligates employers to provide adequate accommodations to disabled individuals when requested.

Within the transition planning process, it is important to include the student and his/her parents. The transition program should be a reflection of the student's personal and career goals, which include his/her preferences and interest. When the student is included in the transition planning process, it increases his/her level of self-determination. The student, the school, parents, teachers, other professionals and outside agencies must work together to achieve the student's future goals. During the transition planning process, the student's community should also be taken into consideration because it can increases the student's level of participation and contribution to the community in which he/she resides.

Based on the research, it is evident that learning disabled students need transitional services to become productive member of society. If the educational system doesn't work to properly prepare these individuals for adult life, than what is the purpose of identifying and labeling these students learning disabled? It is worth the efforts of educators to provide transitional services to learning disabled students, not only because it gives these individuals a sense of pride and self-worth, it also allows learning disabled students to become independent learning disabled adults.

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